“Fusing Asian and American: The 626 Night Market” develops a new analysis of the relationship between space, place, and Asian American youth in the San Gabriel Valley. The 626 Night Market now takes place at the Santa Anita Race Track each summer, and provides a platform for Asian American youth to form, express, and explore their cultural and ethnic identities. From interviews conducted with self-identifying Asian American youth between the ages of 18 and 24, I gathered information on how this night market serves as a platform for cultural exploration and self-identity.

The diverse responses and conflicts experienced in these interviews point to a new development: an ethnic hub. An ethnic hub is a place where Asian American youth can relive the experiences of their parents in foreign countries, but also learn and express their own unique second generation cultural identities. Not only do youth explore their ethnic roots, but they also find a way to fuse their American values, customs, and practices to form one identity. I question the significance and impact of the event, seeing it as a breakthrough for Asian American youth to reconcile their complex cultures: ethnic cultures inherited from their parents combined with their American-raised customs.

In my paper, I answer these questions: how does the 626 Night Market provide a new model for creating, practicing, and learning about Asian American culture? How does space and place in the suburbs affect the idea of cultural authenticity among young Asian Americans? What role does food have in the discussion of space, place, ethnicity, cultural identity and authenticity? This interdisciplinary project draws from food studies, critical race studies, and visual sociology to dissect the relationship between these notions. In my analysis, several themes emerge: the importance of youth, authenticity, and Asian American identity. I find that Asian American youth seek the opportunity to express and learn about their cultural roots in a way that combines their American modality of living with their cultural roots passed on by their parents.

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